

## Historic, archived document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.



13th  
HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Thursday, October 3, 1935.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "Bringing in the Garden." Information from the Bureau of Plant Industry, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

\* \* \*

Because of all my listeners who like the sight of cheerful growing things indoors in winter, the news I have today comes from WRB., our garden adviser and it is about giving houseplants a good start for the season.

W.R.B., always insists that whether the plants you bring indoors thrive or not depends on the way you take them up and handle them and also on the way you treat them once you get them indoors. Many houses today are too hot and dry indoors for all kinds of plants to live happily. Then plants may not get the right amount of light and sunshine and water.

I asked W.R.B., about taking up geraniums and other large plants from the garden and bringing them into the house. He said this didn't pay. He advised instead making a few cuttings to start in the house and discarding the large old plants that have been growing all summer in the garden. Here's what he suggested doing with those cuttings.

Root them in a box of sand kept in a warm place. Later, set the rooted cuttings in pots or boxes of good soil and they will be ready to bloom in your flower borders next spring. Larger plants are a nuisance in the house, and by the time spring comes they are usually too worn with age to thrive when you set them outdoors.

I gather from talking with W.R.B., that he is something of a begonia fan. At least, he's very partial to these plants for indoor gardens. He says our grandmothers who were wise in plant lore all favored the begonia. You can start this plant from clippings, just as you do geraniums. Or you can trim back one of the large begonias so that it will form new growth and blossom during the winter. Several small begonias such as the Prima Donna variety will bloom continuously through the winter, if you give them a place where they can have plenty of sunshine. The begonia semperflorens likes to bloom so well that its flowers will begin to appear even while the cuttings are in the sandbox getting their roots. The rex begonia is noted for its handsome foliage and very delicate blooms. In fact, the whole begonia family seems to incline toward handsome appearances both in their leaves and in their flowers. We grow some varieties mainly for their very decorative leaves. Others are fine for blooming.

If you are planning to have a begonia in your winter garden, you want to put it in surroundings where it can thrive. It will enjoy a warm sunny place for one thing. Then, it needs rather loose and slightly porous soil with good drainage. That doesn't mean that you should let it dry out. Not at all. Few plants can stand that. But you do want to be careful not to drown it in water, since too much water makes this kind of plant shed its leaves.



Just a moderate drinker -- that's the begonia. By the way, perhaps you've noticed that some begonias are subject to attack by a little insect known as the red spider. If you see this pest about your garden, just syringe the foliage with cold water and drown the bug.

Now about house ferns. W. R. B., says that ferns, especially the Boston or sword fern type, are some of the most satisfactory foliage plants for the house in winter. Many indoor garden enthusiasts tell me that they get more solid enjoyment from a thriving fern than from almost any other houseplant. Yet many people have one failure after another when they try to grow ferns. Often this is because of the mistaken idea that ferns can stand no sunlight, must always be kept in a dark part of the house. Ferns will get along for a time without sun. But not permanently. They grow best with a reasonable amount of direct sunlight. Often they can't stand the hot drying afternoon sun that comes through a west window. But they'll only thrive if you see to it somehow that they get a little mild sunshine whenever possible. Even the little maidenhair fern that grows naturally in the deep woods, needs its quota of sunshine and gets it from the sun that filters through the tree foliage above. A good rule generally is: Place ferns in a strong light. Keep them moist at all times, but never soak them nor allow the soil to dry. In spring and summer ferns require three times the water they need in autumn and winter.

Once in a while put ferns in the bathtub and wash them with weak soap suds, and rinse off immediately, taking care not to injure the tender fronds. Mealy bug is a great enemy of ferns growing indoors. This white wooly insect works close to the bottom of the fronds. If you find one, make a practice of examining the plant every day and removing all insects with a splint or toothpick. If the bugs are thick, cut off all the top of the fern within an inch of the ground, and treat it each day until all insects are exterminated. Then grow a new top. Washing will check both the red spider which thrives in the dry indoor atmosphere, and the aphid or green fly -- another fern pest. Once in 2 to 4 weeks, apply some kind of fertilizer to your fern -- a dilute solution of nitrate of soda or manure leachings, or prepared plant food. And every year or two, re-pot your fern.

People who have the best results with houseplants generally give their garden a little water each day. Ferns, begonias and geraniums require plenty of water -- a moist soil -- while palms, crotons, dracenas and all of the so-called "succulents" take less water. A cactus plant often needs only light watering once a week. If you have a palm or fern standing in a jardiniere, be careful not to pour on so much water that the roots are waterlogged.

In the main, the handicaps that indoor plants labor under are: too dry an atmosphere; temperatures 15 to 20 degrees too high; gases and fumes from cookstoves and leaky heaters; lack of sunlight; an accumulation of soot and dust on the foliage; and improper watering.

